somewhat in Wash. Post

Writer's death raises questions of political conspiracy

■ Casolaro was pursuing alleged Reagan-Bush scandals when he died; police investigating.

Boston Globe

WASHINGTON — To his family and fellow conspiracy buffs, Danny Casolaro called it "The Octopus," a shady set of connections he was tracing that appeared to link a series of scandals from the Reagan and Bush administrations involving Middle East arms deals, drug dealing and political corruption.

As he set off for West Virginia last week, the 44-year-old writer told his friends he would be meeting a source who would give him the solid evidence he lacked to prove his suspicions. He also left them with a warning.

"He told us . . . if there was an accident and he died, not to believe it," said Casolaro's brother Anthony, a physician in the Washington suburbs.

Dr. Casolaro recalled his brother's words when Martinsburg, W.Va., police called him Monday with the news that Joseph Daniel Casolaro had been found in a bathtub in a Sheraton hotel room there. He had bled to death from severed arteries in his arms, his brother said.

The police at first concluded that the death was a suicide and had the body embalmed. But when told by his family and investigative reporters what Casolaro had been working on, the police promised a further investigation and clamped a lid on the case. A preliminary report from state medical examiners was due today.

Yesterday, former Attorney General Elliott Richardson called for a federal probe.

"This simply strengthens the case for an in-depth, hard-hitting, thorough investigation . . . I can't think of any explanation other than foul play," said Richardson, whose clients in a politically charged lawsuit here helped Casolaro in his work.

According to his friends and family, Casolaro was primarily working on the case of INSLAW Inc., a small software company that has won several rounds of an ongoing eight-year legal battle with the Justice Department and has Richardson as its lawyer.

It was during his investigation of INSLAW that Casolaro found what he saw as tenuous links between the Reagan administration officials in that case and at least three more political scandals, including the Iran-contra case, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International collapse and the alleged deal to withhold the release of American captives until after the 1980 presidential election.

According to Dr. Casolaro, the "Octopus" was not some secret organization, but his brother's term for a small group of individuals, some of them American, who participate in the clandestine operations as middlemen or fixers with profit as a motive.